



The New American Tempo

By Robert R. Updegraff

**THE NEW
AMERICAN TEMPO**

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By Robert R. Updegraff

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OLD SPECIFICATION

THE NEW AMERICAN TEMPO

THE SIXTH PRUNE

OBVIOUS ADAMS

THE SUBCONSCIOUS MIND IN BUSINESS

By the same author:

CAPTAINS IN CONFLICT

THE NEW AMERICAN TEMPO

And the Stream of Life

by

ROBERT R. UPDEGRAFF

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**THE NEW
AMERICAN TEMPO**

THE NEW AMERICAN TEMPO

AND THE STREAM OF LIFE

I

THE morning after his first night in a king's bed chamber at the Tuileries, to which he had come the day before at the head of a great procession, acclaimed by the populace, Napoleon remarked to Bourrienne, famous French diplomatist and biographer: "Bourrienne, to be at the Tuileries is not all. We must remain here."

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Today many American business men face somewhat the same situation. They find that to have built a business is not enough: they must remain in it. This truth is becoming increasingly apparent to them as they watch the sales curves of this or that item or department slowly—or perhaps abruptly—flattening out. And in the next half dozen years it is likely to become apparent to many others who today feel no concern about the future because their sales curves are still climbing in a very satisfactory way.

Nor will this danger be confined to individual enterprises. Indeed, even now some whole industries are experiencing a disturbing decrease in their volume, and men who for years have been bitter competitors are meeting

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and discussing their declining sales for the comfort they may derive from each other's misery.

In some cases this condition can be traced directly to some new competition; in others the cause seems to be less sharply defined. The public simply seems to have grown indifferent.

Business competition is relatively easy to fight, but public indifference is quite another thing; and it can flatten the sales curve as effectually as the most aggressive competition. Indeed, it is the very passivity of indifference that makes it so difficult to deal with. That is what the English found in coping with Gandhi's Swaraj party in India: its passive resistance worried the English more than any aggressive military resistance possibly could have. They knew

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how to deal with the latter; there is no dealing with the former.

As one listens these days to the shop talk of business men, one is impressed with the extent to which public indifferences seem to be developing in America. Some of them are small and unimportant; others are large and disturbingly important to the men whose capital and business lives are involved. More than that, no one can tell what the public is going to become indifferent about next, with the sudden development of some new interest that takes people's time or money—or both.

Of course, there is nothing new in all this; industries have gone to seed before. But in years gone by business men have had plenty of time to adjust themselves and it was their

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own fault if they were caught napping. Today a new factor complicates the problem—the speed factor. Business men are beginning to discover that something has happened to America lately—something that concerns them vitally. Many who have never before been particularly concerned with changes or “trends,” and have been content to live and think within the restricted circle of their own enterprises, are beginning to look up and out.

Not that these men have broadened appreciably; they are becoming interested through concern: what might this something that has happened to America do to them?

* * *

The most casual skimming of the pages of the first volume of Mark

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Sullivan's book, *Our Times*, brings out sharply the changes that have taken place in America since 1900. Page 375 may be taken as a symbol. On this page are two pictures—one is of Fifth Avenue, New York, in 1900: an avenue filled with horse-drawn vehicles—and a solitary automobile. The other is of Fifth Avenue in 1924: an avenue filled with motor vehicles—and a solitary horse!

It is not the *fact* so much as the *speed* with which this startling change has come about that is significant. It is illustrative of the something that has happened to America since 1900. That something is *a complete change in tempo*.

This it is that is beginning to interest all thoughtful business men, to concern not a few. In the last cen-

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ture the business man had to reckon with materials, machinery, processes, labor, capital, and the competition of his fellows in the market. Over a period of years almost any normally intelligent and aggressive man could hope to build a substantial business if he went about it with singleness of purpose and was able to convince the local bankers of his integrity.

Today a new factor—the new American tempo—changes the whole problem of building a successful business. Materials, machinery, processes, labor, capital, and the competition of other men in the same business, are beginning to be almost secondary to it, as an increasing number of business men in widely separated fields are discovering to their sorrow or delight, depending on

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whether they have missed this tempo or caught it.

The new American tempo is manifesting itself in a number of interesting ways:

First, in the public's disconcerting willingness to turn its back on established institutions, products, methods, ideas, as evidenced by the rusting rails of hundreds of abandoned trolley lines; by the difficulty a woman with long hair experiences in finding a hat large enough to fit her; by the ruthless wiping out of denominational lines and the establishment of broad "Community" churches; and by the fact that the only thing that saved the great solidly entrenched phonograph industry was the timely introduction of a new and vastly superior machine built on a new principle.

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Next, in the public's promptness, amounting almost to aggressiveness, in accepting new products, new methods, institutions and ideas. Witness radio, the auto bus, the metropolitan tabloid newspaper, the air mail, gas and electric refrigeration, pale ginger ale, traffic lights—not to comment on the celerity with which the nation accepted halitosis, and four out of five of us embraced the fear of pyorrhea!

Continuing: in the amazing frankness with which the public will now permit itself to be addressed. Some of the so-called "personal hygiene" copy now running in our periodicals would have been unthinkable in 1900, no matter how discreetly handled, even in the editorial columns. The christening of "Mum" was an inspira-

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tion in its day, and about as far as public taste could safely be tested; to-day there seems to be no objection to dealing with spades as spades, provided you say what you have to say *nicely*, and illustrate it with sufficient charm and sophistication.

Finally, in the promptness with which the public becomes accustomed to the new. So fast is the tempo of America today that such innovations as four-wheel brakes, television, the stepped-back skyscraper, co-operative apartments, talking movies, installment buying, the oil burner, radio transmission of pictures, automatic vending, lose their novelty so fast, and are accepted with such utter matter-of-factness, as to take away the breath of the older generation of business men.

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Of course, the men who are in the throes of promoting some of these things feel that they are having a long, hard fight; but that is only because they are so close to it. When they look back a few years from now and compare their fight with the fight it took to promote some of the earlier developments—the electric light, for example—they will discover how amazingly our national tempo has become accelerated in the past few years.

* * *

If this new American tempo were merely an academic consideration there would be little excuse for this book; but it is a tremendously practical reality and a business factor that will probably make the next crop of millionaires—and set up the next row

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of headstones in the graveyard of business. It is so swift and so much a problem that, consciously or unconsciously, many of the leading banks are more worried about it today than they are about the tangible assets of a business or the "character" of its responsible executives. This month's financial statement and the integrity of the borrower have begun to be almost less of a banking hazard than whether the man at the head of the business can accurately judge the American tempo, and tell what direction public interest is likely to take.

This applies to public tastes, to manufacturing processes, and to marketing methods. Addressing a group of New York bankers, O. H. Cheney, vice-president of the American Exchange-Irving Trust Company, said:

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“Our knowledge of our distribution system as a whole is to a vital degree antiquated, and it is that because changes have been coming so radically and so rapidly. This is a machine age, and we have come to picture distribution also as a machine. Such is not the case, and as long as we think of it in mechanical terms we shall fail to understand it. It is a living thing—a growing thing—hungry, active, restless, everchanging. It has not even definite parts with definite functions. Any part can attempt to assume any function, and protest meetings, lawsuits, Government commission investigations, municipal ordinances and Federal legislation can be of little use. The functions of the retailer, the wholesaler and the manufacturer are not included in the

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Ten Commandments or the Constitution of the United States. If a retailer wants to assume some functions of the wholesaler, if a wholesaler wants to assume some functions of the manufacturer or if a manufacturer wants to assume some functions of a retailer, there is no law which can stop him except the inexorable economic laws of efficiency and profit."

Scores of business men who five or ten years ago faced no problems outside of their plants and offices are today secretly or openly worried for fear something will happen suddenly—another invention like radio, another craze like bobbed hair, another development like the auto bus, another national upheaval like prohibition—that will wipe out or seriously cripple their businesses, make

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costly machinery useless, or destroy the monopoly of some pet patent, without giving them time to turn around.

On the other hand, a new crop of business geniuses has sprung up—men who, with nothing much to lose and everything to gain, have caught the new tempo, jumped in at the right time to capitalize the swing to color, the acceptance of radio, the short skirt, the craze for speed, the lure of the lurid in literature, the breaking down of prejudice against Sunday amusements, the public's discovery that it could have its 1940 luxuries today on the installment plan.

Other developments are going to open up new markets with a speed that will prove fully as amazing. There is no telling what is just around

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the corner; but that there is something new and unexpected may be taken for granted.

Good roads are rapidly spreading the population over a greater area, creating new shopping centers and new shopping habits.

Referring to shopping centers, here again we see the quickened tempo of America, and again from a distribution angle. A few years ago if a new home community began to build up, whether in a town, village, suburb or city neighborhood, very gradually shops would open to supply its needs as this man saw the opportunity for a grocery store, another figured he could make a living with a drug store, a third opened a restaurant, and so on, until, in the course of time, the community was completely served.

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Today the new community is likely to wake up most any morning to find that overnight it has acquired a fairly complete shopping center—a grocery store, a meat market, a drug store, a cigar stand, a five-and-ten-cent emporium, a candy shop, a restaurant, and even a branch bank—all or most of them links of great national or local chains, ready to do business on familiar principles in standardized establishments selling well-known merchandise. This is important both to the manufacturer and to the publics forming these new communities.

II

TERMS OF THE NEW TEMPO

WE will better understand what America's quickened tempo means, and how its influence may be anticipated, either for self-protection or for profit, if we examine briefly its underlying causes. They may be boiled down to a few terms:

Invention

Transportation

Picturization

The World War

Availability

Invention is responsible for radio and television, for mechanical refrigeration, for the oil burner, for automatic vending, and for many other devices that are changing national

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habits of life and thought, and speeding up the national tempo.

There is no telling where invention will stop in any given field, and it is difficult to foretell in what direction it will lead next. But enough business men have lived to regret that they scoffed at the possibility of this or that invention hurting so well established a business as theirs that there is now no excuse for the man who ignores an invention which threatens to interfere seriously with his business. If he makes refrigerators, he may at least make them so that they will readily accommodate an electric or gas refrigerating unit.

If he is in the steel or the aluminum business he may at least start his research department working on such a metal as Edward S. Jordan voiced

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a need for: "an aluminum alloy cheaper, lighter and better than steel"; or he may anticipate that such a metal may be developed and lay plans to protect his business in case it is.

If he is a publisher he may at least keep a sharp eye on public tendencies and reactions and to them shape his publishing plans.

If he is a manufacturer of parts or elements or fabricated material of any kind, he may at least avoid the fatal error of assuming that tomorrow's demand will be the same as today's. Indeed he will, if he is wise, consider that he has certain equipment and certain skill to market, and study constantly to relate them to changing public needs and tastes. If he does not, he may some day find himself so far out

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of step with the American tempo as to be out of the running entirely.

Transportation—chiefly overland transportation by motor—has been a second important cause of the quickening of the American tempo. “Step on it” is more than motor slang; it is expressive of a new American attitude: have what you want, do what you want to do, be where you want to be—and without waiting.

One of the greatest changes that has ever crept over American life, indeed one of the most astonishing changes which has ever come over any people in the history of the world, has been the development of mobility since 1900. It has actually added a fourth to the ancient trio of elemental needs.

Food, clothing, and shelter used to

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be the minimum essentials of life. Today, in America, we require food, clothing, shelter—and mobility.

Mobility may not be so necessary to life as the other three requirements, but it is as necessary to living, as American life has come to be lived.

* * *

The broad and rapid transmission of news and ideas has done its share to speed up American life, but it was not until *picturization* was added to speed and breadth that its full effect on the American tempo began to be realized. Picturization is furnished by the movies, by the picture newspapers, and by the weekly and monthly periodicals both of mass and class circulation; presently it will be developed further in universal television.

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When words were depended upon for telling the news and for registering ideas about life and people and events and merchandise, the public was slow to take up with the new; there are so few word-minded people. But with the movie news reels and the tabloid pictorials and television to show the news, and the movie plots and "sets" to show the backwoods how the city lives, and the magazine and newspaper illustrations to show what the aggressive tenth of the population is doing and wearing and eating, an overnight response is not only possible but seemingly inevitable.

Will Hays points out that it was not long ago that a boy from any small western town could be picked out the moment he walked on the campus of an eastern university.

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Not now. And the girls who come East to school do not have to be taught anything about new styles, for they are getting their ideas from the same source as the eastern girls—from the movies, many of which are shown in Indiana only a little later than on Broadway.

The head of the house sees a new kind of golf suit in the movies and he wants one. The housewife sees a lamp of a new design. Perhaps the whole family gets a new idea for re-decorating and refurnishing the parlor. Down they go to the dealers to ask for the newest.

The World War was a tremendous factor in accelerating the American tempo. First it stretched people's minds to accommodate great new conceptions, and then it threw them into

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high gear and kept them running at a dizzy speed for four years—a jazz speed that is in no small degree responsible for the present tempo, for it has never slowed down to the pre-war speed.

The “stream of life” in America has been swifter ever since the War. Where prior to 1914 it flowed along with a strong, steady sweep, rather placid on the surface because of its depth, and carried business and industry along on its bosom safely and steadily, it is now more like a racing spring freshet. It is as though for the period of the War the stream had been dammed up to form a great lake; and as sediment which has been carried along in a rushing stream settles when the stream spreads out to form a lake, so a great many of our

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old habits of thought and action, and of our old ideas and customs and methods, settled to the bottom of this four-year lake. And while they were settling we were learning from our war experience many new things: about production and distribution, about communication and transportation, about efficiency and organization, about physics and chemistry, about human nature.

We discovered "simplification." Radio was developed; the science of flying was accelerated by a decade at least. Synthesis and interchangeability took on new meaning in industry. Time took on new significance. We learned to do without this and to substitute that—and discovered that we were not seriously inconvenienced.

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Our minds stretched; we grew accustomed to thinking in millions—yes, in billions. We organized ourselves on a scale never before approached in the world's history: A. E. F., Red Cross, Y. M. C. A., Y. W. C. A., Knights of Columbus, Liberty Loan, the Draft, Fuel Administration, Food Administration, Railroad Administration, War Industries' Board. Science and invention put on seven-league boots. We made years of normal progress in a matter of months, and we sloughed off old conceptions, limitations, ideas, customs and methods with equal speed.

Then, suddenly, the artificial dam of the war was removed, and the stream of life went surging forward—rushing with a four-year "head" behind it. Temporarily at least the

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stream of our life here on the North American continent has become turbulent, with the turbulence of shallow water.

The factors that developed depth in the old stream of life: factors such as water-tight orthodox religion, the confidential character of our financial affairs (since laid bare by the Income Tax), the habit of placing long-quantity orders for manufactured products, the custom of living privately inside the four walls of our homes with our families, the practice of buying books according to our own tastes rather than by the year according to the tastes of an editorial board, the habit of waiting for paint to dry, the—but you can complete the list for yourself with the factors that used to make the business or industry with

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which you are connected a fairly stable one in "the old days." These factors have disappeared to a larger extent than we perhaps realize. Our life has become swifter; we have become less patient, more restless, more honest with ourselves, more curious; more tolerant in some ways, less tolerant in others. We are quicker to take up new ideas, to sample new products, to test new services—but quicker, also, to toss them aside if they do not suit us.

Fifteen years ago Lewis Browne's book, *This Believing World*, would very likely have caused a furor in America. Today people are traveling too fast to be particularly concerned over a book that carries away the folk-lore foundation from under orthodox religions with a stream of

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historical interpretation that seems to put an entirely different complexion on the Bible. If they read it at all, they read it with the tolerance of a business man passing on a piece of advertising copy when he is rushing off to catch a steamer for Europe.

Hand-to-mouth buying is more than a merchandising discovery or the natural caution exercised in doing business in a falling market; it is a reflection of the merchant's instinctive fear that the swift-moving stream of life will carry a fickle public past his counters before he can empty them.

It is not so much the active desire to own a radio set that has caused millions of American families to give up the privacy of their homes and invite in a promiscuous collection of

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jazz bands and after-dinner speakers and symphony orchestras and bedtime story-tellers and morning exercise drill masters as it is the fear that without a radio set the stream of life will sweep by; the fear that their neighbors will leave them behind in their knowledge of what is going on in the world, and in their participation in it all.

III

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ALL of this acceleration, all of these changes, have resulted in a change in American *temper* as well as *tempo*.

The practical consideration is: how can this changed tempo and temper be met?

First, we must recognize it for what it is: a speeding up of the stream of American life that is carrying everything before it as it surges through the cities, towns, and villages of the nation. As this stream sweeps on, it leaves little eddies along the shore, quite little bayous and backwaters. And it is in these places that some

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businesses find themselves today, and many more may find themselves tomorrow, with sagging sales curves. The responsible heads of these businesses may ascribe the falling off to some specific cause or causes, and doubtless they will be correct in their analyses. But, fundamentally, the trouble is that their business, or the product or service or facility they have to sell, has been crowded over to the edge of the stream of life and has drifted out of the current.

We see old, well-established businesses which have enjoyed sales prosperity for generations floundering around almost in bewilderment, seeking for ways to bolster sinking sales curves. We see whole industries rubbing their eyes and asking what is happening. We see all kinds of

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schemes being tried in a vain endeavor to *force* sales: to lure, wheedle, surprise, almost to trick people into buying as they used to buy. We see boards of directors of great industrial and manufacturing enterprises hopefully placing aggressive young managers at the helms of their enterprises in an effort to wake them up in a sales way, to lift them out of their heavy sagginess and onto the plane of the lusty younger industries: the motors, radio, electric household utilities and the like.

The hope of these younger managers, the hope of any executive with the responsibility of a business that is falling behind, or threatening to sag seriously, is in the recognition of the fact that whatever the immediate cause of the slump may be, funda-

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mentally the trouble is that the business or the industry is getting over to the edge of the current of the stream of life, if not entirely out of it. It is out of step with the American tempo.

Either of two courses of action is open to them: The first is to accept an out-of-the-current status and plan to make profits on a flattening of flattened sales curve. (Admittedly there are some businesses that can hope to do no better. The sooner they reconcile themselves to their fate and trim sail accordingly, the better off their enterprises will be; for a well-managed business with a horizontal sales "curve" may well be more profitable than a business with a rising sales curve, if the "rise" is being bought at too high a price.)

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The alternative is to force the business out into the current again; a move that can be attempted in at least six ways:

1. By finding or developing a new market or a new use.
2. By revising the product or service to fit new needs or ideas.
3. By increased, or more intelligently applied, advertising and sales pressure.
4. By developing some new product or service to add to, supplement, or supplant the present one.
5. By developing a new sales or distribution policy or method more in line with the new American tempo and temper.
6. By studying the plant (or the organization if it is a service

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business rather than a manufacturing business) as a means of service, and working out some new or more modern way to use it to serve the public more acceptably.

It is not the purpose of this little volume to attempt to prescribe definitely for any particular case, but rather to establish the fact that many of the old specifics have lost their potency as applied to the present-day situation of a business that seems to be drifting into a backwater eddy.

* * *

For example, if the American public has grown so busy and so accustomed to telephones for communication that it is losing the art of polite social correspondence and consequently the demand for fine social

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stationary has fallen off somewhat disconcertingly, no mere matter of advertising ingenuity is going to *make* people return to old habits of correspondence.

Or if the railroads and steamships no longer require a certain type of mechanical equipment because of fundamental changes in motive power, no amount of "high-pressure" salesmanship is going to keep orders flowing into plants which formerly were hard put to turn out that type of equipment fast enough.

Or if people would rather ride in automobiles or go to the movies or sit and listen to the radio than do a dozen other things, the businesses or industries affected cannot hope to argue people back into their old habits.

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The stream of life in America will flow on in spite of everything. Business men can try to dam it (or they can damn it!) as they will, but it will not work for them unless they flow along with it; unless they launch out into the current and keep in the current.

Let us give a thought to that word "current," for it has an important bearing on the problem of overcoming or anticipating the public's indifference. The public's *current interest* is what forms the current of the stream of life, and it is to this interest, in a fundamental way, that the business man must cater if he is to flow with the stream. But he must be cautious in launching out into the current. When it is rushing on at the rate that it is today, there is danger of getting

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caught in some whirlpool and mistaking the swirl of the pool for the onrush of the stream.

There are numerous exciting whirlpools in today's stream of life which are proving irresistible to many manufacturers. For example, there is the whirlpool of the investment trust, the whirlpool of the oil burner, the whirlpool of the airplane, and the chain-store swirl. There are several others which seem to have a peculiar fascination for the men who are sailing their business barques in the stream of American business.

Some manufacturers will continue to whirl at a dizzy speed in one or another of these whirlpools (mistaking rotation for progress) until they are sucked down; others will gain strength from the very struggle of

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resisting the downward pull, free themselves ultimately from the swirling maelstrom, and float off serenely on the bosom of the stream: the investment trust, the oil burner, the airplane, the chain-store successes, established and profitable—leaders in tomorrow's financial, industrial and commercial autocracy, with sales curves shooting sharply up.

* * *

One reason for these whirlpools is the lesson taught to American manufacturers by the War. The experience of the War greatly accelerated the manufacturing tempo of America: not merely the production rate, but the basic tempo of industry.

Prior to the War a manufacturer made certain kinds of things in his factory. Over a period of years he

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might add other items, and even venture into new fields of manufacturing if he were more imaginative or inventive than his fellows. But with the coming of the War, stove factories were suddenly turned into ammunition factories, inland boiler foundries and bridge plants made ship plates, toilet goods laboratories made hospital supplies, and almost everybody ended by making something out of his line.

This experience opened many men's minds to the fact that about the only limit to the flexibility of a factory, within the actual physical limitations of the plant and its equipment, is the owner's imagination. Presently billiard table manufacturers were making phonographs; auto accessory plants were adding radio parts; gun

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factories were making hardware; and so on, all through industry.

The building and equipping of war-time plants greatly increased the production capacity of American industry, and this also is an important factor in the present situation. We still have greater production capacity than is actually needed.

This availability of additional production capacity, coupled with the new flexibility in the use of production facilities and the continuous development of automatic machinery, which in itself considerably accelerates the tempo of production, has led inevitably to branching out. This has resulted in new competitions which have, of themselves, tended to speed up the tempo of business.

A manufacturer looks over the

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fence and discovers that the idea of electric refrigeration, say, has captured the imagination of the public. Arriving at the office Monday morning, he sends for his general manager.

“John,” he asks, “couldn’t we make electric refrigerators in our plant?”

John considers for half a minute. Visions of small motors, copper tubing, cabinets bought from some ice-box manufacturer. . . .

“Sure,” he says.

And after a few hours or weeks, as the case may be, another manufacturer is sailing out into the stream with a new electric refrigerator. Something over a hundred and fifty of them were in the whirlpool at the last count—and there is no telling how many more are ready to be launched.

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Now, the electric refrigerator or the oil burner will probably be the salvation of some businesses; but for others which rushed to adopt them without realizing that the real problem in connection with those two appliances is not production or sales, but service, they are going to be entered in red on the company's books as costly experiments, as ill-considered dives into the turbulent stream of American life.

I think it may be set down as a wise rule, that in attempting to steer a business back into the stream of life the barque used should be of a type one is accustomed to sailing. That is to say, it is dangerous to venture out into the stream with a product or a service, the making or marketing of which is too foreign to one's previous experience.

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With the stream of American life moving as swiftly as it is, the American business man will do well to hug the shore until he gets the feel of the current, and if and when he does get out into the stream, to bear in mind two facts:

First, that he is likely to face stiffer competition than he has ever faced before—and face it more promptly; and that if he is to hold his place on the bosom of the stream he will have to push his business aggressively, with forceful advertising and sales effort.

Second, that the American business man cannot build for the distant future with anything like the assurance of permanency he formerly enjoyed. Invention, scientific progress, and social evolution are moving at too swift a pace. Consider, for instance,

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two of the developments already mentioned: the electric refrigerator and the oil burner. (They are cited as illustrations not because they offer any greater hazards than a dozen other industries, but because they stand out so sharply as promising new industries just now very much in the stream of life.) Both may develop into substantial industries that will thrive for a century. On the other hand, next month someone may develop a simpler process of mechanical refrigeration that will crowd the present mechanical refrigerator over to the edge of the stream in a surprisingly short time. The oil burner may be the ultimate form of heating, but it may also prove to be only a comparatively brief phase we are going through in the transition from the

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clumsy and wasteful use of coal to the efficient use of some other form of fuel or energy, or to the use of coal or oil in some as yet undiscovered way that will render all of our present heating equipment obsolete.

The point is, that because a thing is modern or serves a present need is no sign that it is permanent.

At the same time the present makers of electric refrigerators or oil burners or other products of "current" interest will be better able to adjust themselves than newcomers in the field, and they will be reasonably safe if they visualize their problem as one of making refrigeration, rather than *an* electric or gas refrigerator; heating equipment rather than *an* oil burner.

This does not mean that a manu-

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facturer should change his plans with every shift in the wind, or give up just because some strong new competition develops; but it does mean that he should know which way the breeze is blowing and whether he is running with the wind or tacking. And it means that he should constantly study the public's needs rather than concentrate his study on his own products or his own plant.

IV

SPEED—WHAT IS IT?

ARE tempo and speed one and the same? In a sense, yes: both represent acceleration. But there is a good deal of loose thinking on the subject of speed. It will clarify this whole subject of tempo if we digress briefly to examine into the true nature of speed.

Some time since, I interviewed S. L. Rothafel, better known as "Roxy," director of the New York theatre which bears his name, one of the largest theatres in the world.

Mr. Rothafel had been out of touch with the public for a period of two years and when his theatre was opened he encountered the new Amer-

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ican tempo. A year later I sat in his palatial office until nearly midnight one night listening to him relate his experience in getting adjusted to the new tempo.

“The first thing I noticed a year ago when this theatre opened and we undertook the formidable job of filling its 6,254 seats every day was that life had speeded up tremendously,” said Mr. Rothafel. “When you are dealing with masses of people every day you are too close to see changes working. But when you come back fresh after a two-year vacation, changes stand out clearly. I imagine it would be the same in a retail store or a railroad or a hotel or restaurant, or most any other kind of a business dealing directly with the public. I soon found that to hold people’s in-

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terest the first requisite was speed, the second requisite was speed, and the third requisite was still more speed!

"I found that even the overture had to be fast! I do not mean that we quickened the tempo of the overture; but we had to avoid the slow, solemn type of overture and select something with speed in its place, or we lost our audience.

"As soon as our opening was over and we settled down to the week-after-week job of entertaining a great block of the American public daily, I began seriously to study this problem of speed.

" 'What has happened to the public?' I asked myself. 'What is this thing we call speed?'

"The more I puzzled over it and experimented with it, the more I be-

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came convinced that it was not a mere mechanical quickening of tempo. It was a restlessness craving for change, a reaching for fuller living.

"I realized that here was a problem that had to be licked, and I determined to do it without descending to jazz methods or a jazz program. We have licked it. We fill this enormous theatre every day at least twice. We have done this in a jazz age without resorting to jazz. We do it with speed, but the audience does not recognize the speed; it is concealed. We have found out what speed is."

"What is it?" I asked, and was not prepared for the clean-cut analysis that was forthcoming.

"Speed is accelerated tempo, of course," replied Mr. Rothafel, "but speed is also style, color, change, light,

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brevity, contrast, sweep—all with a reasonable amount of motion. These are the elements we work with today in building the Roxy program.

“All of these we use to build a program of music and color and light and stage spectacles that fills this great theatre to the doors—at a scale of prices ranging from fifty cents to a dollar sixty-five.

“The public’s speed mania worried me a bit until I discovered that it was not jazz that people wanted (I personally believe people are tiring of jazz and of living so fast that the baby leaps from the cradle into a fox-trot), but speed—in the form of style, color, change, light, brevity, contrast, sweep—plus a somewhat accelerated rhythm of the whole. I have proved this to my own satisfaction—which

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must be box-office as well as personal!

“While I am only an entertainer, I believe I should follow the same formula if I were a merchant or a manufacturer. I should speed up my business with style, color, change, light, brevity, contrast. These are the things that stimulate people’s minds—and speed is largely a matter of mental stimulus.

“We find brevity a great help to speed. We do lots of things in snatches—five or six minutes of this; seven or eight minutes of that. A snatch of grand opera; a quick little silhouette scene; a few bars of a symphony. Done in a normal tempo, but in such a small dose that the audience wishes there were more—which in itself makes for a sensation of speed.”

It seems to me this broad concep-

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tion of speed, as crystallized by one of America's greatest showmen, furnishes the answer to one of the most serious problems facing us all as business and professional men, and as individuals.

* * *

All of the influences under discussion—invention, transportation, picturization, the World War—would have less business significance and smaller potentialities from a marketing standpoint if it were not for the fifth factor—*availability*.

The increased—and increasing—availability of merchandise has materially accelerated the tempo of American merchandising, just as quantity production methods and the lesson of the War have accelerated the tempo of American manufacturing.

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The chief factors that have brought this about are: the chain store, penetrating as it now does to the suburbs and the "sticks" with all kinds of merchandise; the metamorphosis of the drug store, adding evenings and Sundays to the availability of hundreds of items of merchandise, not only in shopping centers but in residential neighborhoods; the automobile, eliminating the distance between the home and stores of all kinds; house-to-house selling, carrying the merchandise right to the front or back door; magazine shopping services, bringing the avenue shops to the interior towns; the roadside gasoline station, a new outlet for merchandise dotting the map of America perhaps more thickly than any other; and now automatic selling which is just in the offing.

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In addition to these physical factors influencing availability, there are the price and terms factors: the lower prices made possible by simplification and quantity production which have made six-cylinder cars and radio sets and toilet soaps and hundreds of other commodities and specialties available to lower salary strata; and the deferred payment plan already referred to, which has still further increased immediate availability.

To get these factors (and of course there are others which come into our thoughts readily enough) clearly organized in our minds is to see the *why* of the new American tempo. To understand the *why* is to be able better to recognize—and even to anticipate—further changes, and to gage their probable effect on any given business.

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This gaging is likely to be the big problem of the future.

Meanwhile there is one point to be borne constantly in mind: from a marketing standpoint the danger in trying to synchronize a business with the present American tempo lies in failing to realize that the public tempo of *acceptance* of a new idea is not necessarily the public tempo of *purchase* of the product or service that idea represents. There is still a time element to be figured on, and the same old need for good hard common sense and executive drive.

* * *

“What would you do if you were a merchant or a manufacturer and faced the problem arising out of the accelerated America tempo?” I asked “Roxy.”

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“If I were a merchant or a manufacturer or the head of any business enterprise,” he replied, “and had the problem of making good in this age of speed, I should make use of the same discovery that has made this theatre a big box-office success.

“I should do little rushing and much planning, little straining and much studying. I should set down on a sheet of paper the eight words:

Style
Color
Change
Light
Brevity
Contrast
Sweep
Motion

“Each of these words I should apply in turn to my business, or to any particular problem of my business, until I had found how to speed

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it up to a point where it synchronized with the speed of American life as it is being lived all over this broad land today."

May this not be the key to synchronizing any business, any enterprise, any movement with the new American tempo?

THE END

